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MEMORANDUM FOR: **The Director**

The main revision I have made in this memorandum is a rewrite and elaboration of "Section A" on page 2. There is an additional thought in two new sentences at the end of the second paragraph on page 1, and the paragraph going over from page 1 to page 2 is changed somewhat, mainly for the sake of greater clarity. The rest is unchanged.

**JOHN HUIZENGA**  
Deputy Director  
National Estimates

10 November 1969

(DATE)

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MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: An Appraisal of the Paper, "The Modern World, A Single 'Strategic Theater'"

While the paper cited above says a number of things we think are correct, it has other judgments which seem to us either grossly exaggerated or wrong. Where the author goes astray it is because, as we see it, he is proceeding from premises which seem to him so obvious that he does not trouble to justify them and which are in fact mistaken.

The paper assumes for example that the US is moving toward withdrawal of its military power "on a worldwide scale" and will in future lack the will to protect its interests in situations of challenge. If friends and foes really believed this was true, some of the untoward developments foreseen in the paper might actually occur. Even if the US withdrew from Vietnam without achieving its declared goals there, clearly a pattern-setting development for the author, it does not follow that US security relationships everywhere would be compromised. Confidence among some allies might be shaken, but this effect would not be irreversible. It would be possible to offset it by subsequent declarations of intention and by actions. And it is extremely unlikely that the US, as inherently great a power as it is, would go into a total funk. Much more likely, in the wake of a setback in Vietnam, would be a conscious effort to reassert the American role as a world power, especially if there were signs that hostile powers were disposed to speculate on American weakness. Historically, all great states have encountered setbacks, and when the basic ingredients of power remained, they recovered. The American case is unlikely to be different.

A second major premise in the paper is that American influence in the world rests entirely on military power and a demonstrated willingness to use it in all situations of threat to American interests. This is to misunderstand the nature of power in the contemporary world. Our power is sufficient to

deter major aggressive moves by the USSR or China, but it is, ironically, too overwhelming to be credible against affronts undertaken by petty powers in petty matters. The world sees it as absurd, or worse, unjust, if a superpower threatens to use military force to compel a small state, say in disputes over fishing rights or nationalization of foreign-owned enterprises. Whether the small state complies or remains defiant, the political cost to the superpower comes to exceed by far the importance of the matter at stake. Thus power to influence the actions of others does not flow automatically from the possession of great military strength. A vast disproportion of strength in fact gives power to the weak. There are many situations in the world which the US cannot affect because the threat to use military power to enforce its will is not credible, actual resort to force being irrelevant, ineffective or manifestly too costly.

Where the following comment on particular sections of the subject paper is critical, it is largely because the judgments made proceed from the faulty premises described above.

Section A. The "truism" of one-world interdependence is a half-truism. It is true that modern communications have broadened the political audience vastly, have created a "world opinion" which reacts to events everywhere. Attitudes are formed and shift, though by no means uniformly, in response to developments which are perceived as significant for power relations, i.e., for the intentions and capabilities of major actors on the world stage. All states in determining their policies nowadays take some account of this fact, which is historically new and of increasing weight in recent decades.

Yet it is also true that parochialism persists in a remarkable degree. Attitudes are formed in various parts of the world, not on the basis of any common idea of what is good or bad for the "world community" as a whole, but in accordance with varying perspectives which are conditioned by regional or national interests. The indifference of states, which remain the primary actors on the international scene, to remote developments which do not affect their interests directly continues to be noteworthy.

Indifference, particularism, contradictory interests of states and groups set limits to the concept of the world as a "single strategic theater." In fact, great powers still find,

as they always have, that particular acts of theirs set off countervailing forces; what they gain by an action in one area or relationship involves a cost in some other. Hitler "solved" his Czech problem and Brezhnev his, but the local gain in both cases had wider consequences and costs. The USSR has not been able to reconcile its interest in preserving an allied relationship with China with interests it wished to pursue elsewhere -- in Europe, in India and other parts of the Third World, in the Communist movement, in relations with the US. So too, the US has paid a price for its interventions in Vietnam and the Dominican Republic, and even had it not intervened, there would have been other kinds of costs.

The trouble with the "single strategic theater" concept is that it overlooks the multi-dimensional nature of world politics. No power, however great, can dominate all the contradictory forces at work and command them to move in a single direction to its own advantage. A state's interests, moreover, exist in a concrete context, usually local or regional. Even a world power like the US defines its interests in relation to particular areas and assigns different weight and priority to each interest. Thus also our tests of will and power with the Soviets over the last 25 years, though they have clearly had import for world power relations as a whole, have invariably been played out in a confined theater without having basic effects on much else that was also going on in the world.

World politics is not one great winner-take-all contest, like a prize fight fought to a knockout. It is more like the Olympics, with a variety of actions involving different contenders going on simultaneously in different parts of the stadium. No national team wins everything and, unlike the Olympics, the contests never end.

Section B.I. It is probably true that all the Asian states mentioned here, if they really believed that the US would cease entirely to be a military factor in the region, would be alarmed. Most obviously prefer that the US succeed in its effort in Vietnam, but they do not assume that an unfavorable outcome there would eliminate the US as a factor in the region or leave them imminently exposed to aggression. Changes in US policy which the President outlined on his Asian trip, which called for greater self-reliance

within the region in the first instance with the US in a supporting role only as needed, did not apparently provoke cries of alarm.

Section B.II. The return of the Ryukyus to Japan and adjustment of the conditions under which the US has military bases there is not intended to diminish our military commitment or capability in Northeast Asia. We know of no Japanese or Korean opinion which has expressed fear of this. In fact, the return of the Ryukyus is being undertaken precisely in order to insure that the security relationship with Japan will continue to be politically viable in that country. The assertion that India will be alarmed over US "eagerness" to move out of the Pacific, as manifested by the Okinawa development and possible US withdrawal from Indo-China, is unsupported by any evidence we know of. In fact, the Indian government has been distinctly unhelpful in its attitude toward the American effort in Vietnam.

Section B.III. The paper appears to argue that we should have a military presence in the Middle East in order simultaneously to guarantee Israel's security and to insure the survival of traditional and pro-Western Arab regimes. Leaving aside the matter of how exactly military force would be used, these are incompatible objectives. Even now, it is our identification with Israel, as all the Arabs see it, which promotes radicalization and anti-Americanism in the Arab states. There is no way in which American military power can be used to control political forces internal to the Arab societies. If the author means what he appears to mean he would have intervened militarily to save the monarchies in Iraq and Libya, to prevent radicals from coming to power in Yemen, South Yemen, and Sudan, would currently do so to oppose the fedayeen in Lebanon, and would be prepared to do so in future to save a pro-Western regime in Tunisia. If American administrations have refrained from such ventures it is because they have known that there are limits to what even American military intervention can accomplish, and that bluffing and puffing that you are a great military power and will not tolerate, etc. has very little effect nowadays on political forces in small states. Moves toward intervention will almost invariably, in fact, strengthen forces which thrive on anti-Americanism.

Section B.IV. In Latin America, too, the paper traces the problems of American policy to "extreme unwillingness recently to use 'power.'" The author seems oblivious of the inter-American tradition of non-intervention, of the sharply-increased anti-American nationalism in most countries of the hemisphere, and therefore of the costs and complications which result from attempts to use

"power." We still have great influence in Latin America but we might lose even what we have if we abandoned restraint and tried to command events by a show of "power."

Section B.V. Whoever the "experts" may have been who predicted that NATO would be awakened by the Czech events to a new sense of "the danger from the East," they did not include analysts in this Agency nor so far as we know elsewhere in the government. We foresaw that the West would appraise the invasion as an intra-Bloc affair and that the shock effect would be temporary. Nevertheless, we believe that the ability of Soviet propaganda and diplomacy to play on Europe's desire for detente has been reduced, at least for the time being.

We have several times in the last two or three years warned in National Estimates that the credibility of the American security commitment to Europe would be undermined by precipitate moves to withdraw forces. But it is a considerable exaggeration to say that all informed Germans already believe that the US is in the grip of isolationism and that West Germany will have no choice but to come to terms with Moscow.

Section B.VI. We agree and have written often that Soviet policy is very sensitive to Moscow's appraisal of American will and resolve. We also agree that the Soviets show real concern over Chinese intentions in the long pull. But we think it unlikely that in the foreseeable future the Soviets will develop so great a "fear" of China that they will be impelled to seek a "genuine" detente with the US. The US may be able at times to use Sino-Soviet tensions to advantage in dealing with both parties, but the gains made in this way are likely to be marginal and transient for some time to come.

Section B.VII and VIII. These are comments on the American domestic scene which are strictly speaking outside our province. It will be evident from the comments above that we do not share the author's view that American military power is collapsing and that American will to play a world role commensurate with our real power is dissolving. How much the author may be out of touch with the forces that govern domestic and world politics today is suggested by his recalling that Lincoln used artillery against dissidents and survived in power and reputation because he was "right."

31 October 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Requested Comment on Memorandum, "The Modern World,  
A Single 'Strategic Theater'"

While the attached memorandum says a number of things we think are correct, it has other judgments which seem to us either grossly exaggerated or wrong. Where the author goes astray it is because, as we see it, he is proceeding from premises which seem to him so obvious that he does not trouble to justify them and which are in fact mistaken.

The memorandum assumes for example that the US is moving toward withdrawal of its military power "on a worldwide scale" and will in future lack the will to protect its interests in situations of challenge. If friends and foes really believed this was true, some of the untoward developments foreseen in the paper might actually occur. Even if the US withdrew from Vietnam without achieving its declared goals there, clearly a pattern-setting development for the author, it does not follow that US security relationships everywhere would be compromised. Confidence among some allies might be shaken, but this effect would not be irreversible. It would be possible to offset it by subsequent declarations of intention and by actions. And it is extremely unlikely that the US, as inherently great a power as it is, would go into a total funk. Much more likely, in the wake of a setback in Vietnam, would be a conscious effort to reassert the American role as a world power, especially if there were signs that hostile powers were disposed to speculate on American weakness.

A second major premise in the memorandum is that American influence in the world rests entirely on military power and a demonstrated willingness to use it in all situations of threat to American interests. This is to misunderstand the nature of power in the contemporary world. Our power is sufficient to deter major aggressive moves by the USSR, but it is, ironically, too overwhelming to be

credible against affronts undertaken by petty powers in petty matters. It would be seen as ridiculous and would therefore be counterproductive as measured in political costs if a superpower threatened to use military force to compel a small state in a matter of fishing rights or nationalization of foreign enterprise. Power to influence the actions of others does not flow automatically from the possession of great military strength. A vast disproportion of strength in fact gives power to the weak. There are many situations in the world which the US cannot affect because the threat to use military power to enforce its will would for such reasons not be credible.

Where the following comment on particular sections of the memorandum is critical, it is largely because the judgments made proceed from the faulty premises described above.

Section A. The "truism" of one-world interdependence is a half-truism. While world-wide communications now have an influence on attitudes everywhere, what is remarkable is the persistence of parochialism. The indifference of states, which remain the only real actors on the international scene, to remote developments which do not affect their interests directly remains noteworthy. Even when we are involved in a clash of interest with the USSR the issue posed is invariably local or at least regional. And the memorandum itself, after initially asserting that the whole world is now "a single strategic theater," does not pursue this assertion further by actually showing how all the gloomy developments foreseen in various regions are connected.

Section B.I. It is probably true that all the Asian states mentioned here, if they really believed that the US would cease entirely to be a military factor in the region, would be alarmed. Most obviously prefer that the US succeed in its effort in Vietnam, but they do not assume that an unfavorable outcome there would eliminate the US as a factor in the region or leave them imminently exposed to aggression. The future US policy which the President outlined on his Asian trip, which called for self-reliance within the region in the first instance with the US in a supporting role as needed, did not apparently provoke cries of alarm.



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